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SUBJECT: SENATOR MURKOWSKI'S MEETING WITH UNIFICATION VICE
MINISTER RHEE

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Ministry of Unification (MOU) Vice Minister Rhee Bong-jo on January 9 emphasized to Senator Murkowski and the Ambassador the importance of implementing the Joint Statement of principles issued in September after the fourth round of the Six Party Talks. He suggested broadening the scope of the Six Party Talks to encompass counterfeiting and drug trafficking areas but at the same time advocated against pressing the North Korean regime too hard. Senator Murkowski acknowledged Korean sensitivity about pushing the North too hard, but insisted that the USG would continue to enforce its laws prohibiting counterfeiting. The Ambassador added that the Treasury Department would soon be sending a delegation to Seoul to consult with South Korean officials on counterfeiting and related issues. END SUMMARY.

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NEED TO IMPLEMENT SIX PARTY JOINT STATEMENT . . .

¶2. (C) On January 9, Vice Minister of Unification Rhee Bong-jo remarked to Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) that the North Korean nuclear issue began in the early 1990s, but we now had an opportunity to make progress by capitalizing on the Joint Statement of principles agreed last fall. The issue now was implementation, despite differences about interpretations of the agreement. He said North Korea was focused on two things, namely the timing of the provision of light-water reactors and the improvement of U.S.-DPRK relations. The North, of course, wanted these benefits in return for an announced commitment to dismantle its nuclear programs.

¶3. (C) VM Rhee added that Seoul welcomed the Joint Statement in part because it removed major obstacles that had blocked progress in inter-Korean relations. Now, he said, the South could move ahead with North-South reconciliation. Once the Joint Statement was implemented, they could further inter-Korean relations. If the United States came up with an action plan to implement the Joint Statement, this would also advance North-South relations. Bilateral U.S.-DPRK issues, such as counterfeiting, could also be addressed within the framework of the Six Party process. The United States and South Korea needed a new comprehensive approach to "manage" North Korea.

14. (C) In response to Senator Murkowski's question of whether the inclusion of additional items on the Six Party Talks agenda might complicate or delay our ability to deal with North Korea and its nuclear capability, VM Rhee responded that we needed to pursue all issues within the Six Party process. The North was a peculiar country and might reject further talks if we tried to tackle the problems in different tracks. It would be important to find a way to address bilateral issues while not diluting the main focus on the nuclear dismantlement.

BUT AVOID PUSHING TOO HARD ON COUNTERFEITING

15. (C) VM Rhee opined that U.S. steps taken against the circulation of counterfeit dollars had had a greater impact on the North than any other recent U.S. action. He cautioned, however, that if we were to push North Korea too far, its leaders might see risks to regime security and stability, and this could weaken the momentum created by the Six Party process. The North was reading different lessons from recent U.S. measures. He insisted that the North would not behave in the future like had in the past, although we still needed a clear decision from the North that it would stop counterfeiting. Then, we could turn our attention back to the nuclear issue. Change happened very slowly in the North, perhaps slower than anywhere else in the region, but the North could not avoid changes, which were already occurring.

16. (C) Senator Murkowski said that she understood clearly that there was sensitivity in Seoul about not pushing the North too much, but the USG would not close its eyes to counterfeiting and related issues. We needed to tell the North to stop its behavior and that the USG would continue to uphold its commitments in support of a resolution of the nuclear issue through the Six Party Talks.

BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS IMPORTANT

17. (C) VM Rhee mentioned that we needed to ensure changes in the North were taking place in the correct direction, and that U.S.-ROK coordination was important to manage this process. It would be hard to have an efficient or productive policy toward the North without close consultations. He said coordination would also help the alliance maintain stability in Northeast Asia. The Ambassador responded that the Treasury delegation's visit this month in Seoul to consult on counterfeiting and related issues was an opportunity to align our positions more closely.

VERSHBOW